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***First Region (ROTC)***

# IG NEWSLETTER



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## ***Soldiers' Responsibilities in Requesting Tuition Assistance***

Several recent cases have revealed that there may be some confusion on the part of soldiers at ROTC Battalions regarding the Army's Tuition Assistance Program and the soldiers' responsibilities. The following information is provided to all First Region soldiers in an effort to clear up this confusion.

AR 621-5 states that soldiers in the grade of E6 and below must obtain their commander's signature on the DA Form 2171 to request tuition assistance; however, the commander has the discretion not to sign the DA Form 2171 if he or she does not want to. The commander should base this discretion on his or her assessment of the impact of the soldier's education plan on the soldier's ability to meet his or her duties and responsibilities. A soldier is still expected to meet all the duties, responsibilities, and obligations of his or her assigned position while attending classes. If the commander's assessment is that the soldier cannot meet his or her duties, responsibilities, and obligations and attend classes, the commander has the prerogative not to sign the DA Form 2171 and, in effect, deny the request for tuition assistance. Soldiers in the grade of E7 and above may sign their own DA Form 2171, but are still expected to meet all the duties, responsibilities, and obligations of their assigned position while attending classes. If the soldier's duty performance wanes, the soldier's supervisor may counsel the soldier and initiate adverse administrative action against that soldier if the soldier's duty performance does not improve. Attendance or participation in classes in support of an off-duty education program is not a valid excuse for failure to perform one's military duties; soldiers are required to be able to perform assigned military duties without interference.

A different situation involves seeking tuition assistance to pay for classes for which the soldier is already receiving tuition assistance. If a soldier is taking classes for which tuition is already partially or completely paid, the soldier may not seek tuition assistance for that portion of the tuition that has already been paid. If the soldier does, the soldier is in violation of paragraph 6-8I, AR 621-5, and may also be in violation of Article 132 (Fraud), UCMJ. A soldier is not authorized tuition assistance funds for courses for which the soldier is already being reimbursed or is receiving tuition-free. Tuition assistance is only authorized to pay for the remaining unpaid amount after other benefit programs have been used. If a soldier knowingly applies for tuition assistance for classes that the soldier knows the tuition is already paid for or is gratis, the soldier is guilty of improperly presenting for approval or payment a false or fraudulent claim in violation of Article 132 (Fraud), UCMJ; even if the soldier does not receive payment. All soldiers of First Region are advised that they should discuss their education goals with their supporting installation Education Office in the context of fully informing them of all tuition grants and waivers provided to them by their host institutions. It is the soldier's responsibility to ensure they do not violate AR 621-5 and UCMJ.

## **Active Duty Family Members in Remote U.S. Locations Gains New TRICARE Benefit**

A new cost-saving benefit, TRICARE Prime Remote for Active Duty Family Members (TPRADFM), began 1 September 2002, for family members of active duty sponsors who reside in locations designated as TRICARE Prime Remote (TPR) within the 50 United States. To be eligible for the new benefit, which is similar to TRICARE Prime, active duty family members (ADFM)s must live with their sponsor. In order to be eligible for TPR, the sponsor must be assigned to a duty location and reside at a location that is at least 50 miles or more in distance, or approximately a one-hour drive from the nearest Military Treatment Facility (MTF).

Previously, the only option available to ADFMs residing in remote locations was to seek care from providers under TRICARE Standard benefit; however, starting 1 Sep 02 this inequity was eliminated. Those family members now have access to a TRICARE Prime-like benefit which has no co-payments, deductibles or claim forms to file, and providers who meet rigorous standards for providing quality health care.

Enrollment in TPRADFM is voluntary, but highly encouraged, especially for family members who live with their sponsors in areas far away from a MTF. ADFMs who choose to enroll may receive health care from either a TRICARE network provider or, if a network provider is not available, from any TRICARE-authorized civilian provider. To enroll, ADFMs must complete and submit a TPRADFM enrollment application to their TRICARE Regional Managed Care Support Contractor (MCSC). TMA recently authorized an extended "pre-enrollment" period to allow family members whose applications were received September 1—20 to enroll in TPRADFM effective 1 September 2002. After 20 September 2002, the regular Prime enrollment period will resume, with applications received between the first and the 20th of month resulting in enrollment on the first day of the following month. Applications received after the 20th of the month will result in enrollment effective the first day of the second month after their enrollment applications are received (For example, if an application is received 21 September 2002, enrollment begins 1 November 2002). Telephone numbers of MCSCs and enrollment applications are available online at <http://www.tricare.osd.mil/remote/benes/adf.html>

## **TRICARE FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS**

Now is the time when students prepare to leave home and head off to college. One of the important things to do is select the TRICARE option which will work best for both the family and the student. Remember to check the student's ID card and make sure the care, and DEERS, are still valid and reflect eligibility for benefits. If the ID card expires during the school year, DEERS will normally change to an ineligibility status on the expiration date. To be eligible for TRICARE, unmarried children must be under the age 21, or age 23, if they are full-time college students.

Determine if Prime is available in the area where the school is located. This can be done by calling the toll -free number in the region where the student will attend school. If the student will be living in a different region than the rest of the family and enrolls in Prime in that region, this a split enrollment and no extra enrollment fee will be required. When enrolling a student in Prime under these circumstances, make sure to tell the gaining region this is a split enrollment.

Health care alternatives may be available through the school. Many colleges offer a primary health care benefit at a reasonable price. The premium is often included as part of student fees. With school health insurance as primary coverage, TRICARE Standard and Extra are excellent alternatives for use as secondary coverage. Once the deductible has been met, TRICARE will often cover all or most of the student's out-of-pocket expenses after the primary insurance has processed the claim.